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Interesting Correspondence  
between

His Excellency Governor Sullivan  
and  
Colonel Pickering.  
Boston, 1808.



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# INTERESTING CORRESPONDENCE

BETWEEN

HIS EXCELLENCY GOVERNOUR SULLIVAN

AND

COL. PICKERING;

IN WHICH THE LATTER

VINDICATES HIMSELF AGAINST THE GROUNDLESS  
CHARGES MADE AGAINST HIM

BY THE

GOVERNOUR AND OTHERS.



BOSTON :

PRINTED BY GREENOUGH AND STEBBINS,

*Over the Palladium Office.*

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1808.

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22/4/1808  
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GOV. SULLIVAN TO COL. PICKERING.

BOSTON, 18th MARCH, 1808.

SIR,

I YESTERDAY had yours of the 9th instant. It was sent to me from the post-office. I had intended to have neglected your letters in the post-office, merely because I would avoid being drawn into an epistolary controversy by a man, who from his situation can better pursue it, and from his inclination and habits can better attend to it than I can : but the letter was brought by the post-boy, and I opened it.

I cannot but pity the chagrin with which the propriety of my conduct in returning *unread*, your former letter, has involved you. I will first notice your ungentlemanlike, insidious, and even profane remarks on the proclamation I have issued for a day of publick fasting and prayer. Your professions to have read that production with pleasure can never be considered as founded in sincerity, while you are evidently attempting to disturb and subvert the devotion of all the men, who are engaged in commerce, of all who are engaged in the fisheries, and consequently of all who depend upon commerce for a market for the produce of their lands : and in fact to destroy the temper of mind, which the day has a claim to ; and which the circumstances of the country afford to it.

When I invited the people to pray for a blessing on their enterprises by sea and land, I did not expect that this would be improved to urge them to sedition and rebellion against the government of the nation, if an embargo or any other restriction upon or regulation of trade should be deemed necessary as a measure of national safety, you cannot but observe that the introductory part of that draft is on general publick principles, and that our peculiar situation at this time is very slightly touched upon. Your temper,

urged to an extreme by your disappointment in not having your own opinion the rule of national measures over the majority of Congress, has carried you too far.

As to my treatment of your former letter in returning it *unread*, the more it is considered the more it must be approved. You, indeed, found your claim upon me as being the organ of your communication in your being a senator ; but you will recollect that there is another senator from this state besides you, and that there are seventeen representatives. The world knows that your view of national affairs, and that of your colleague are widely different : and that your sentiments would be directly contradictory to each other. We are unfortunate enough to know that there is among our representatives as great a variance in opinion, more especially on the subject of your letter, which I returned *unread*, the embargo. You acknowledge in your letter of the 9th, that all of them have an equal claim with you to make the governor an organ of communication ; and you must confess, and if you [do] not, it is a fact well known that their statements of our national affairs, more especially as to the present embargo, would be widely different from yours and from each other. If the governor of this commonwealth was obliged to communicate what every member should direct him to do, what would be the consequence ? Would he not transfer all the debates of the national legislature from Washington to Boston, where they would remain under fruitless inoperative discussion ; where decisions could have no efficacy, and the means of correct information, and the voice of all concerned, as parties interested, must be excluded. Each state having the same claim, the national compact must cease to exist.

I have *read* your letter in print since I returned the manuscript. It was printed, I find, before I received it by the mail. Had I *read* it on receiving it, I should, independent of your extraordinary claim, have refused to lay it before the legislature of this state, as a public document. The communication from the governor of this commonwealth to its legislature, must be always of something which he believes to deserve their attention, and to be within

their authority to act upon as a legislature. I do not conceive that your letter was within this description. It appears to me on *reading it from the press*, to have been a seditious, disorganizing production. The people of Massachusetts called me to the head of this state under the expectation that I should consolidate the commonwealth, and strengthen the national union and energy ; I shall not, therefore, be made a tool of by you, for effecting directly opposite purposes.

If we are any thing, we are a nation under the organization of the general government. I will not waste time here to inquire whether that government is right in regard to the embargo or not. No government is always right. You may take it for granted, if you please, that the embargo act was an error, yet it was a constitutional act. It was the exercise of a power which must, from the nature of things exist in the national government. What then was your appeal from the sovereign power of the nation to the authority of one of the states for, but to disunite, divide, and dissolve the nation? Are you not one of the men who were lately so very vociferous against disorganization? If the senators of Massachusetts, when they happen to be in a minority in Congress, can appeal to their state, why cannot Rhode-Island, Connecticut, New-Hampshire, and those of the other states do the same? And where will this end but in an overthrow of the national government? This dissolution you will deny to be an object with you ; but yet you will not deny that there is in existence such a character as Aaron Burr. You will not deny Miranda's expedition, or Burr's plot. You will not hesitate to own that several millions of dollars have been by them expended, or that more than half of it was expended by Burr, who had no money of his own. I do not call on you to say where this money was obtained ; you do not know. But this you know, that success in that plot would have been the destruction of the United States, and that his plan would have divided the nation, and placed the northern part of it under the dominion of a foreign power. You certainly know, Sir, that the first principle in the social compact of a republick is, that the voice of a constitutional majority shall govern ; the moment you

depart from this in practice, that moment you dissolve your government, at least as far as you depart from it. What then is the sum of all your labours, but an attempt to excite uneasiness, discontent, and divisions in the nation, because the minority of whom you happen to be one, cannot govern the majority in a great national question? If there ever was an attempt in its nature and consequences tending to rebellion and sedition, this is one. I write freely, Sir, the situation of the country demands it.

If the legislature of Massachusetts could, on the communication of even both its senators, jointly made, by the governor, as their involuntary organ, control the national councils in regard to our concerns with foreign powers, why should not the legislatures of each of the other states do the same? And does not this completely dissolve the national compact? Is this what you and your party are after? If it is, come forward and avow it openly, and we shall know where to meet you.

I request that this may close our correspondence. I have not time to waste in this way. I can gain the end of my political year as governor without your aid; and as a private citizen I want no information from you. I have already assured you that I will not be the organ of your communication; and I now assure you that I will not be the object of your address in matters evidently tending to the overthrow and dissolution of the United States.

Your letters are evidently intended for the press. That of the 9th I apprehend was under the type before it reached me; and will be published before you have this. Why do you not send them immediately to the printer, and let me rest in quiet?

We are wrong if we quarrel with our own political existence. We are a nation; and though there were *not a few who were fed daily on the publick rations that from timidity or some other cause, doubted the propriety of the declaration of independence*, yet we shall now be wretched beyond description or example, if we divide ourselves among the European nations. We shall in that case fight their



battles, and pay the expenses of their wars. We shall in each state have one or more tyrants for leaders, in cruel wars amongst ourselves. Look at Poland and other nations who have trusted in foreign protection. Indeed, Sir, let our national government be bad or good, we have nothing but that under God to save us from aggravated ruin : and yet your exertions appear to me to tend directly to its subversion. Instead of the insidious jealousies your letters are calculated to spread, you ought as a senator to express your mind freely on measures ; and when there is a majority against you, you ought to submit until the strength of your calm reasoning shall bring them over ; or circumstances and events shall point to your superior wisdom. This *dictatorial* temper cannot be indulged to any man ; it is opposed to the first principles of the social compact.

I do not go into the question, whether the embargo act, which you make, or would make the apple of discord to set this commonwealth in an uproar against the federal government, is right or wrong ; it is enough for me that it is a constitutional act of the supreme power of the nation. If it proves to be wrong on experience, the same power can repeal it.

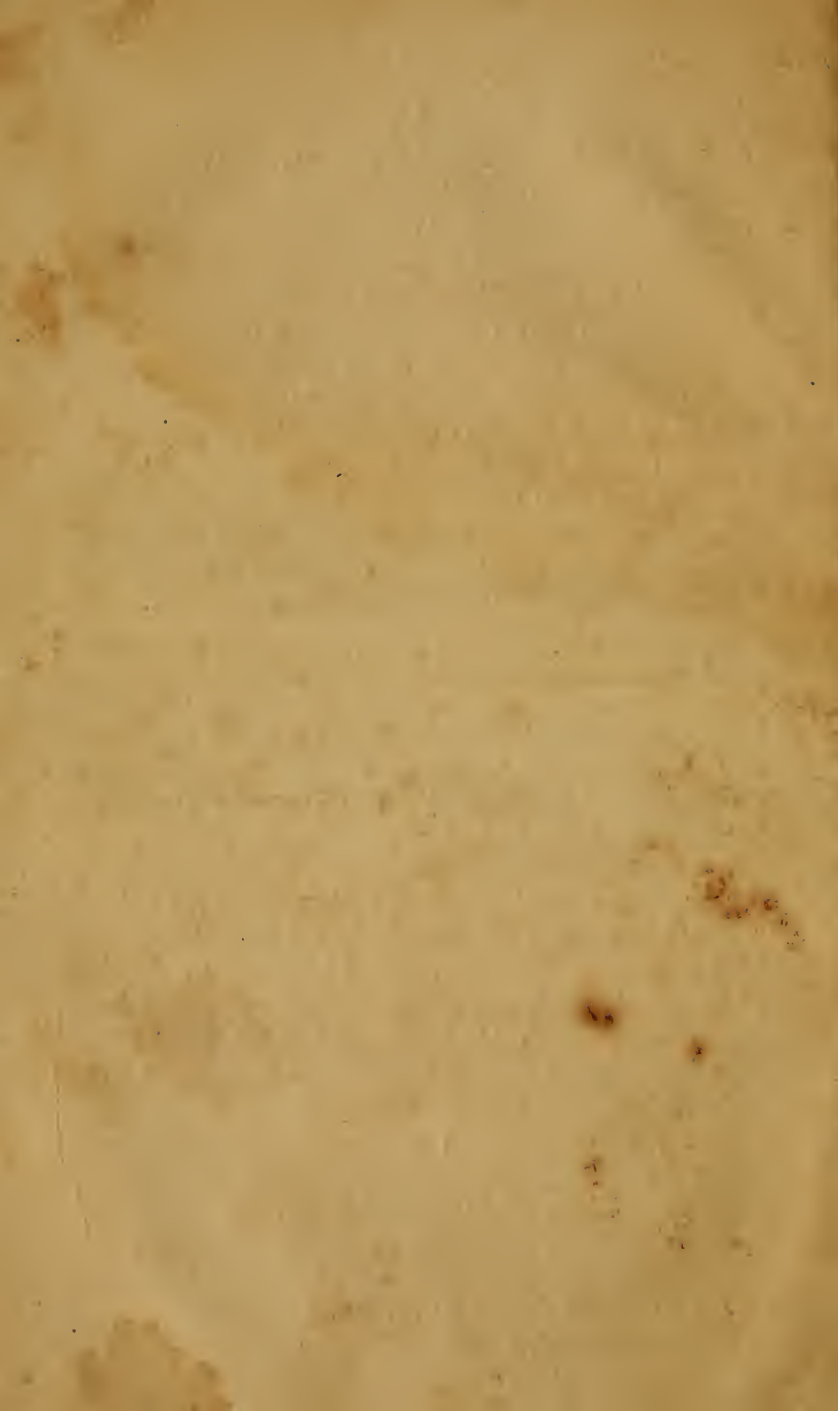
Mr. Adams, your colleague, is quite opposed to you in his opinion of the embargo. He voted for it, and still considers it as a wise measure, and as a necessary one. I have his letters before me upon it. I know nothing peculiar in you, that ought to make your opinion the standard of my judgment, or the rule of this state ; more especially when it appears to be intemperately set against the whole government of the United States.

I am,

Your very humble servant,

JAMES SULLIVAN.

*The Hon. TIMOTHY PICKERING, Esq.*  
*a Senator in Congress, United States.*



## COL. PICKERING TO GOV. SULLIVAN.

CITY OF WASHINGTON, APRIL 22, 1808.

SIR,

SO much time has elapsed since your Excellency sent me your letter of the 18th of March, you may imagine that I have forgotten you. But for many reasons that letter demands my notice. It was evidently intended for the press, to promote your re-appointment, at the approaching election. But a review of the copy, replete with unwarrantable criminations and rudeness, probably satisfied you, or your friends advised you, that a publication of the whole might rather prejudice than promote your interest; and therefore you suppressed the greater part. But fearing no charges which your Excellency has brought or can bring against me; and thinking it proper that the whole letter should be known; I shall publish it entire. Those who will be at the trouble to compare the paragraphs you have chosen to publish as *extracts*, with the letter itself, will see that they are so compounded, and with such alterations and additions, as to be, in fact, a *studied imposition* on the public.

In examining your letter, I observe many extraordinary passages calling for animadversion; but to notice all of them, would too severely task my own, as well as the reader's patience. In my remarks, it may sometimes be difficult to adapt my language to the subject, without wounding the public sense of the decorum proper to be observed in a writing intended for the publick eye. But it shall be my endeavour not to transgress that bound.

Your Excellency perceiving that doubt or disbelief had arisen, relative to your assertion, that you returned my first letter "unread," seems resolved, in your last, to remove all doubt, and to en-

force belief, by repeating, directly or indirectly, five or six times, that you did send it back unread. Now, a plain man, conscious of having told the truth, would have rested on a single assertion.

You suggest that the governour's communication to the legislature "must be always of something which he believes to deserve their attention, and to be within their authority as a legislature:" but that "you do not conceive that my letter was within this description." This opinion of my letter you appear to have formed *since you acknowledge* that you have read it. And how could you undertake to decide that point, as by your own statement you did, *without reading it*? Was it not possible, was it not *probable*, that in the actual state of things, the information it contained might afford matter proper for the consideration of the legislature of Massachusetts, relative to the embargo, which was peculiarly injurious to that state? Will your Excellency maintain the servile doctrine that as freemen they might not even take into consideration their grievances, resulting from the measures of their national rulers? May not the legislative body of a state make known to the national legislature the sufferings of the whole people of a state, as individuals exhibit their private wrongs? Is it lawful for legislative bodies only so far to interfere as to express *approbation*, and never, however forcible the call, their *disapprobation* of national measures, by making application for a change? Has your Excellency forgotten that, during this very session of Congress, as governour of Massachusetts (and as you state, "with the unanimous request of its legislature,") you presented to Congress a *strong* memorial in behalf of some of the citizens of that state who had been purchasers of lands under grants from Georgia? And did the essential interests of *all* her citizens, deeply affected by the embargo, less merit the attention of your Excellency and the legislature than the claims of a *small number* of those citizens?—Perhaps you will say that the legislature had already adopted resolutions approving of the embargo. True; and I accounted for it on the supposition, very naturally to be entertained by the legislature, That the assembled *wisdom* of the nation, at Washington, would not have adopted so terrible a remedy but for evils of the greatest magnitude, which an embargo alone



could avert. Now the great design of my letter was, to satisfy them that the embargo was not, in the national legislature, the offspring of *wisdom* : for *wisdom* cannot exist without *knowledge* : and I still affirm that Congress were not informed of any adequate cause for the embargo : and therefore, instead of implicit approbation, the embargo demanded examination, and perhaps a remonstrance, with the view to effect its repeal.

But you say “Mr. Adams, my colleague, is quite opposed to me in his opinion of the embargo. He voted for it, and still considers it a wise measure, and a necessary one. You have his letters before you upon it.” True—he did vote for the embargo : and I must now tell your Excellency how he advocated that measure. It is not willingly, Sir, that I speak of him in an address to the publick. Though often opposed in opinion, on national measures, there has never existed for a moment any personal difference between us. But as you have now contrasted his opinion with mine, to invalidate my publick statements ; you compel me to relate the fact.

In my first letter I informed your Excellency of the haste with which the embargo bill was passed in the senate. I also informed you that “a little more time was repeatedly asked, *to obtain further information, and to consider* a measure of such moment, of such universal concern ; but that these requests were denied ;” and I must now add, by no one more zealously than by Mr. Adams, my colleague. Hear his words. But even your Excellency’s strong faith in the president’s supreme wisdom may pause, while independent men will be shocked at the answer of my colleague to those requests. “The president (said he) has recommended the measure on his high responsibility : I would *not consider*—I would *not deliberate* : I would *act*. Doubtless the *president* possesses such further information as will justify the measure !” Need I give to your Excellency any other proof (though other proof abounds) of “blind confidence in our rulers ?” Need I give further evidence of “the dangerous extent of executive influence ?”—When the people of Massachusetts see a man of Mr. Adams’s acknowledged abili-

ties and learning advancing such sentiments ; when they see a man of his knowledge of the nature of all governments, and of his intimate acquaintance with our own free republican government, and of the rights and duties of the legislature ; especially of their *right and duty to consider, to deliberate, and according to their own judgment, independently of executive pleasure, to decide on every publick measure* : When, I say, the people of Massachusetts see this ; will they wonder if a *majority* in Congress should be *overwhelmed* by the authority of *executive recommendation* ? And had I not reason to be alarmed at “ the dangerous extent of executive influence,” which to me appeared to be leading the publick mind, by its blind confidence, to publick ruin ?

Without commenting on the very exceptionable language in which your Excellency has judged it not improper to indulge, in respect to my remarks on your proclamation for a day of publick fasting and prayer, I feel myself called upon to repel the charge, *that my “ professions to have read that proclamation with pleasure, can never be considered as founded in sincerity.”*—You, Sir, may affect to doubt my sincerity : but no persons acquainted with my life and conversation will suspect it. These persons know I am not a hypocrite in religion : and by this time I believe your Excellency is convinced that I am not a hypocrite in politicks.—But, Sir, I must avow to you, that I am incapable of profaning any religious institution. With perfect truth, I repeat to your Excellency, that I did read your proclamation for a fast “ with great satisfaction.” And, I further assure you, that my friends here, delegates from Massachusetts manifested the like satisfaction : we all approved of the religious sentiments you expressed. But your Excellency knows, and the world knows, that such a proclamation may be issued, and other external marks of christianity be exhibited, and “ the weightier matters of the law be omitted.”

This leads me to another passage in your letter. Having refused to lay my letter before the legislature, you and your partisans have laboured for reasons as well to justify the refusal, as to decry the letter itself. Among other things, it has been reported to

be "an electioneering letter." And your Excellency, as if to give your sanction to that report, has said, that *my letter was printed before you received it by the mail.*

If at a momentous crisis, to exhibit a plain, unvarnished tale of truth before the eyes of a people misled by the partial statements or misrepresentations of pretenders to republicanism and patriotism, be in itself proper, ought my letter to be censured as an electioneering project? Why do we boast of the freedom of the press, but for its usefulness, in a free country, to convey correct information to the people? Certain news-papers had long been the vehicles of misstatements and falsehoods, calculated to deceive the people. It was at *such a time* that I thought it my duty to come forward with a statement of the situation of our publick affairs—so far as we were permitted to know them—and to vouch for the *truth* of the *statement* with my *name*. I knew that this would disturb the hornet's nest, and put the insects on the wing; and that with increased venom they would dart at me their poisoned stings: but armed with *truth*, as with a coat of mail, I had nothing to fear from their attacks.

In your Excellency's letter to me of the 18th of March, you "say, I have read your letter in print, since I returned the manuscript. *"It was printed, I find, before I received it by the mail."* Really, Sir, with all my previous information of your character, I was astonished at this declaration to me; and in writing under your hand, which will preclude all evasion; and when the falsehood of the assertion was of so easy detection. I will state the facts.—My letter bears date the 16th of February. On the 20th I put it into the post-office at Washington. In your letter of March 3d, you acknowledged its receipt on the 2d.—On the 21st of February I put into the post-office here, the copy of my letter of February 16th, addressed to a friend in Boston. This friend, in his letter of March 3d, acknowledged the receipt of that copy. He said also, that after waiting as long as decorum required, for a communication of it through the medium of the legislature, the press would give the letter to the people in a pamphlet. A short address to

the reader, prefixed to the printed letter, is dated at Boston the 9th of March—the very day on which I received at Washington your letter of the 3d.

But your Excellency was not contented with the positive assertion, *that the letter was printed before you received it by the mail*: you meant to induce belief in the assertion, by suggesting some ground for it. Your words are, “It was printed, *I find*, before I “received it by the mail:” as if your Excellency had made a previous inquiry for the purpose of ascertaining the fact. And of whom would your Excellency, as a lawyer—of whom would any man of common sense, make the enquiry? Certainly of the printers who set their names on the title page of the letter: and if you had inquired of *them*, you would have *found* that it was *not printed* before you received it, nor until after you had acknowledged the receipt of it.\* The facts which I have stated, demonstrate the *impossibility of what you assert*. This will enable every reader duly to estimate all your other assertions.

Your Excellency unquestionably intended to print the whole of your letter, and if, by a bold assertion, you could have satisfied the people that mine was printed before you received it, it would have countenanced the report of your friends, that it was merely an electioneering letter, and unworthy of credit. But reflecting afterwards on the certainty of detection, you concluded, to keep out of sight the greater part of your letter, and particularly the part on which I am now commenting; hoping that, deterred by your extraordinary charges against me, comprehending those of exciting sedition and rebellion, I should not dare to publish it.†

You suggest that I have perverted your invitation to the people to pray for a blessing on their enterprizes by sea and land, and

\* The manuscript was received by us on the 5th, and the work expected to be published on the 9th—a few of the first copies however were extorted from us on the evening of the 8th. *Greenough & Stebbins*.

† A paragraph in the Chronicle, of the 28th April, signed Cato, fully confirms the truth of this opinion of Col. Pickering. *Editor*.



used (or to take your own word) “improved” it to urge them to sedition and rebellion against the government of the nation :” That my letter appears to you to have been “a seditious, disorganizing production :” That it was designed “to disunite, divide, and dissolve the union :” That “the sum of all my labours was to excite uneasiness, discontent, and divisions in the nation :” That “if there ever was an attempt in its nature and consequences tending to rebellion and sedition, this is one :” That my “address evidently tends to the overthrow and dissolution of the United States as a nation :” And that, “Let our national government be BAD or good, we have nothing but that, under God, to save us from aggravated ruin ; and yet your exertions appear to me to lead directly to its subversion.”

These are heavy charges ; and your Excellency, though yourself a lawyer, would perhaps have acted prudently to have taken counsel before you advanced them. To answer and repel the whole—seeing you do not point to a single passage in my letter to support them—it might be sufficient to say, *that they are all unfounded*.—If my letter were “seditious, and disorganizing, and tending to excite rebellion”—it is very wonderful that your Excellency should have been the first and only person to make the discovery. If I needed any *authority of opinion* against yours, I could quote that of statesmen and lawyers of the first distinction in the United States, who have honoured me with their approbation and thanks. But however gratifying this *unsought praise* of highly respectable individuals, I need not stop here. My letter is before my fellow citizens in Massachusetts : it is indeed before the nation : and the decided approbation of the thousands who have read it, demonstrate not only the extreme anxiety of the public mind to obtain the information I gave ; but that the facts stated carried conviction of their truth and importance, and justified my inferences. I say not these things boastingly : for I feel no other emotion than what every man must feel who aims to serve his country, and finds his labours have not been in vain.—Your reproaches, Sir, and the reproaches of other men like you, detract nothing from my peace of mind. *Improbis vituperari, laudari est*. And

let me assure your Excellency, that although this kind of praise will not make me vain, it will never make me angry.

I shall pass over your Excellency's doctrines of *passive obedience*, and *blind confidence* in our rulers ; that the free citizens of the only remaining republick on earth, ought *silently* to submit alike to a *BAD* government and a *good* one ; and that it would be a *waste of time* to inquire whether the embargo is *right* or *wrong* : only remarking, that avowing such servile tenets now alike fashionable in France and Turkey, in respect to their despotick masters) you characteristically pronounce my plain history of the embargo, an attempt "to disunite, divide, and dissolve the nation."

I could fill a volume with just remarks on your Excellency's letter ; but I fear tiring those who may take an interest in our correspondence ; and therefore pass unnoticed many subjects of animadversion. But there are two prominent ones which I must not omit.

The first is a plain insinuation, of a nature to excite astonishment *that I was connected with Aaron Burr, in the conspiracy* with which he has been charged ! I now understand your Excellency's letter to me of the 24th of last January ; which being remarkable for nothing but its absurdity, I had thrown by, and nearly forgotten.— I had sent you the printed papers laid before the Senate, in the case of John Smith, senator from Ohio, accused of having been concerned in that conspiracy. Among the papers was the report of the committee in the case, drawn up by my colleague, Mr. Adams, the chairman ; which, I remarked, "could not fail to attract attention ; especially of gentlemen" [like your Excellency] "of legal information." And you must have observed, that it has attracted very great attention ; as will every thing from the pen of Mr. Adams, whether it merit censure or applause.

After thanking me for the communication, which I thought would be interesting to your Excellency almost wholly on account of my colleague's report,—you dash away in the following strain.

“I have long been convinced that Burr’s expedition was the land detachment of Miranda’s ; and both under a foreign influence : that both were intended to dismember the union ; and to place the northern part of the United States, either civilly or politically, under the guidance of the British cabinet. There are many who co-operate in this project without knowing it. Burr must have had large sums. And I have no doubt but that a great part of it went from this northern hemisphere. The few who hate our forms of government have had address enough to conceal their principles from their followers.”

On such rodomontade, comment would seem to be thrown away. I certainly should never have noticed it, had not your Excellency, in your letter of March 18th, presented me with a new edition, with additions.

After suggesting that the tendency of my letter was to overthrow the national government, you thus address me. “This dissolution you will deny to be an object with you ; but you will not deny that there is in existence such a man as Aaron Burr. You will not deny Miranda’s expedition, or Burr’s plot. You will not hesitate to own that several millions of dollars have been by them expended, or that more than half of it was expended by Burr, who had no money of his own. I do not call on you to say where this money was obtained ; you do not know. But this you know, that success in that plot would have been the destruction of the United States ; and that his plan would have divided the nation, and placed the northern part of it under the dominion of a foreign power.”—All this your Excellency advances with the affectation of profound political sagacity ; and with as much apparent gravity as if you expected to be credited.

No one will be foolish enough to deny, what all the world knows, “Miranda’s expedition”—unwarrantably commenced in this country, and defeated in the manner which is generally known : but not a man in the world, your Excellency excepted, will sup-

pose that *Miranda's object in landing three or four hundred men in SOUTH-AMERICA, was to dismember the UNITED STATES.*

If the object contemplated by Mr. Burr was to dismember the union, to detach the western from the Atlantick states, he must have known it to be altogether impracticable, without the general concurrence of the western people. He knew that some leading men in that country (all professing themselves to be republicans) had formerly contemplated such a separation; and had been intriguing with the Spanish government to accomplish it. It is now known that some of these men were pensioners of Spain. Is it not probable that Mr. Burr, in his visit to the western country, in 1805, conversed with men of influence there, who might be disposed to a separation? and that he mistook *their* ideas of it for the sentiment of the *people at large*? and thence conceived the project of a separation to be feasible?

But instead of several millions of dollars being at Mr. Burr's disposal (which you have permitted yourself to say that I shall not hesitate to own—plainly insinuating that I know, and know as a partaker in his plot) every man of information, in the Atlantic states, knows that Mr. Burr's want of credit was such, that no persons (certainly no federalists) could have been found to advance him, on his own security, even a small sum. But when he was in Kentucky, where his true character was not generally known, some of the inhabitants were surprized, as I have understood, into an acceptance of his bills, to the amount of forty or fifty thousand dollars, drawn on places where he had no funds to discharge them. And would any man, with several millions in his hands, resort to such dishonourable means to raise that comparatively trifling sum? But your Excellency has further allowed yourself to say, not only that Burr had several millions (or more than half of several millions) at his disposal, but that you have no doubt that a great part of his large sums went from the northern *hemisphere*! as, with your characteristick precision you call the northern states. Is it possible for your Excellency to mention one solitary reason, or *shadow* of reason, that could induce federal men of property (for surely you



would not implicate any of your own party) in Massachusetts, for instance, to advance a great part of several millions of dollars to any man, much less to the man whom they detested—as a Catiline, an unprincipled, profligate man—and for the purpose of detaching the western from the Atlantic states ? This is such an absurdity as would expose any character of less weight than your Excellency's to derision. Yet absurd and incredible as it is, that Burr should have had several millions in his hands, you have proved yourself capable of insinuating that *I* knew where he obtained them !

That Mr. Burr, in 1806, formed some project injurious to the United States, I have not doubted. And yet the state of the country, the good disposition of the people, and his absolute want of means, presented such insuperable difficulties to the execution of a project so extensive as the dismemberment of the union, or the invasion of Mexico,—that the conception of one or the other, by a man of Mr. Burr's understanding, could be accounted for only from a consideration of his forlorn condition.—I think it was in January 1807, when at Washington, where Burr's plot almost engrossed the publick attention, that in writing to a friend, in order to avoid the imputation of weak credulity, as to the existence of a project so manifestly impracticable, I thought it necessary to state the grounds of my own belief : such as, that Mr. Burr was a bankrupt in fame and fortune : that he saw the impossibility of ever retrieving *either* in the United States ; while his ambition had no bounds : that whatever might be the issue of his enterprize, his condition could not well be worse : and that reduced to *desperation*, he might form the wildest projects ; knowing, that if by any possibility he could succeed, he might again become an important man ; and if he failed, that he might be eased of a life which a man, of his aspiring mind, reduced to poverty, and destitute of power, might consider worse than death.

Such, Sir, was my view of the man and his project with which you have the temerity to insinuate that I was connected ! A man who I believed could so easily accommodate his principles to his ambition ! A man to whom as President of the Senate, I had, in-

deed, manifested the usual civilities demanded by our relative official situations ; but from whom I had withdrawn, during his last year's presidency of the Senate, all personal regard. Yes—I had purposely withheld *my hand* from *his*, then reeking with the blood of the murdered HAMILTON.

Hear me farther. A few days before the close of the same session of Congress, a bill was brought into the Senate, to grant to Mr. Burr the privilege of sending and receiving letters and packets by the mail, free of postage, during life. Mr. Burr was in the chair ; and his presence is imposing. Nevertheless, the bill was opposed. The opposition was begun by Mr. Hillhouse and myself. But the bill was passed in the senate, by a majority of 18 to 13. In the house of representatives it failed at once, by an indefinite postponement,

And yet, Sir, with this man, thus detested, and finally withstood to the face, in a favourite measure, which by means of the post-offices would have facilitated his projects, whatever they were, and perhaps even then in contemplation ;—with this man you were desirous to have it believed that I was an associate !—What language of reprobation would be too strong for such injustice to my character ? Doubtless you intended that the people of Massachusetts, and of the United States, as far as your letter should travel, should believe, or at least suspect, that I was concerned in Burr's conspiracy ! For whoever reads your whole letter will see that it was designed for the news-papers : but your own reflections, or the advice of friends, restrained you to the publication of a part.

One word more. You say that success in Burr's plan would have divided the nation, and placed the northern part of it under the dominion of a foreign power. Will your Excellency have the goodness to inform the people of Massachusetts, and of the United States, how a separation of the *western states* would have placed the *northern states* under the dominion of a foreign power ? To men whose minds have the ordinary powers of discernment, this is quite incomprehensible. Who but your Excellency would have

imagined that such a separation would induce the Atlantick states further to diminish their strength, by a division into a *northern* and a *southern* section ? On the contrary, would not the northern and the southern states then cling more closely together ? *These* are the thirteen United States, which, with half their present population, dared defy the power of Britain, and finally achieved their independence. Where, then, is the danger, of their being now brought into subjection to the same power ?

The last topic in your letter which I shall notice, is in the following passage.

“ We are wrong, if we quarrel with our own political existence. We are a nation ; and though there were *not a few, who were fed daily on the publick rations, that from timidity, or some other cause, doubted the propriety of the declaration of independence*, yet we shall now be wretched beyond description or example, if we divide ourselves among the European nations.”

Your Excellency’s meaning here is obvious. You intended to have it understood that I, from *timidity, or some other cause*—meaning, probably, attachment to the British—“ doubted the propriety of the declaration of independence ;” a charge utterly unfounded, and known to be so, by every man in Massachusetts acquainted with my life.

I have hitherto treated the various calumnies invented and diligently published against me, with silent contempt. In one instance, indeed, some of my friends solicited my consent to a publick prosecution. I yielded to their request. In my absence, the libeller was indicted, convicted, and punished. And what can your Excellency imagine to have been one ground taken by his counsel, in defence, or to mitigate the punishment of the libeller ?—Wantonly and cruelly assailed as I have been in news-papers devoted to the vilest slanders—slanders at this time renewed with increased virulence,—shall I be charged with vanity if I mention it ? It was to this effect, as stated to me, soon after, by one of the counsel for the prosecution ; that the counsel for the libeller urged be-

fore the court, *that the fairness of my character was so well known, and my reputation so firmly established, the libel could have done me no injury.* But, Sir, that trial was local ; and perhaps the knowledge of the proceedings has reached but a very few persons ; while I have been slandered before the nation. Perhaps I have too long silently despised the slanders and their authors. But at the present time a governour of the commonwealth of Massachusetts has lent himself to their aid.

I am now, Sir, far advanced in life, I have children and grand-children who, when I am gone, may hear these slanders repeated, and not have the means of repelling them. I have, too, some invaluable friends in most of the states, and many in that which gave me birth ; men who are the ornaments of society and of their country. All these, if not my country itself, interested as it is in the publick concerns on which I first addressed you—have claims which I ought not to leave unsatisfied. Thus called upon to vindicate my character, I am constrained to give a concise narrative of my publick life.

The disputes between Great-Britain and her American colonies (which now form the United States) commencing with the stamp act, in 1765, and revived in 1767, by the act of parliament for raising a revenue in the colonies—gave rise to two parties, which at length were distinguished by the names of whig and tory ; the latter acquiescing in British claims of taxation ; the former resisting them.—In 1767, the assembly of Massachusetts sent a circular letter to the speakers of the other Assemblies, for the purpose of promoting the adoption of uniform measures, (by petitions and remonstrances) to obtain a redress of grievances. Most of those assemblies concurred with that of Massachusetts.—In 1768, a letter from Lord Hillsborough required the assembly of Massachusetts to rescind the vote of their predecessors for sending that circular letter. This was peremptorily refused, by a majority of 92 to 17. The representatives of Salem, my native town, were among the 17. At the next election, they were neglected, and whigs chosen in their stead. This was the crisis of the political



revolution in that town. I was then four-and-twenty years old. My elder and only brother was chosen one of the representatives : and from that time I was myself actively engaged in all the whig measures which were preliminary to the final revolution and independence of the colonies. Always a member of the committees of inspection and correspondence, the burthen of writing rested upon me. Those writings, in their nature temporary, perished with the occasion. The memory of one of them, however, is preserved by Dr. Ramsay, in his elegant “ History of the American Revolution.”

When in 1774, the British parliament, by an act usually called the *Boston Port-Bill*, shut up the capital of Massachusetts from the sea, thereby prostrating its active and extensive commerce—as it is now prostrated by the acts of our own government, imposing the *embargo*—the seat of the provincial government was removed from Boston to Salem. Sympathizing with the sufferers of Boston, the inhabitants of Salem (I think in full town-meeting) voted an address to the new governour, General Gage ; the great object of which was, so far as an expression of their sentiments would go, to procure relief for their brethren in Boston. *That address was written by me.* Its conclusion Dr. Ramsay has thought worth transcribing on the page of history. It here follows, with his introductory observation.

“ The inhabitants of Salem, in an address to Governour Gage, concluded with these remarkable words—‘ By shutting up the port of Boston, some imagine that the course of trade might be turned hither, and to our benefit : But Nature, in the formation of our harbour, forbid our becoming rivals in commerce with that convenient mart ; and were it otherwise, we must be dead to every idea of justice, lost to all feelings of humanity, could we indulge one thought to seize on wealth, and raise our fortunes on the ruins of our suffering neighbours.’ ”

Another incident it may not be improper to mention. While the seat of government remained at Salem, I received a note from

the secretary of the province, informing me that the governour wished to see me at the secretary's house. I went, and was introduced to General Gage. Taking me into another room, he entered into conversation on the then state of things, the solemn league and covenant, and the non-importation agreements. In the conclusion, the general said—"Well, there are merchants who, notwithstanding all your agreements, will import British goods." I answered—"They may import them, but the people will use their liberty to buy or to let them alone."

These incidents are mentioned, not for any intrinsic importance attached to them; but as evidences of the confidence I had acquired among my fellow-citizens, from an early period of our political disputes with Great-Britain.

On the 19th of April 1775, was the battle of Lexington. This is the era to which Slander seldom fails to recur, when, *for party purposes*, my character is to be held up to reproach. I will state the facts, with all the accuracy in my power, after a lapse of three-and-thirty years.

About nine o'clock in the morning, being in my office (the registry of deeds for the county of Essex) a captain of militia from the adjacent town of Danvers, came in and informed me that a man had ridden into that town, and reported that the British troops had marched from Boston to Lexington, and attacked the militia. This officer, whose company belonged to my regiment, asked for orders, and I gave him a verbal answer, that the Danvers companies should march without waiting for those of Salem.

Immediately I went to the centre of the town, and met a few of the principal inhabitants. A short consultation ensued. Those who knew the distance of Lexington from Salem, and its relative situation to Boston (of which I had no personal knowledge, and but an indistinct idea) observed, that the British troops would certainly have returned to Boston long before the Salem militia could reach the scene of the reported action; and that our marching

would therefore be useless. Nevertheless, we concluded to assemble the militia, and commence our march; *and for this sole reason,—That it would be an evidence to our brethren in the country, of our disposition to co-operate in every measure which the common safety required.* This idea, however, of the fruitlessness of our march, was so predominant, that we halted a short time, when about two miles from the town; expecting every moment intelligence that the British troops had returned. But receiving none, we resumed our march, and proceeded to Medford, which was about five miles from Boston. Here, to the best of my recollection, I first received certain information that the British troops were still on their march, and on a route which rendered it possible to meet them. I hastened the march of the militia on the direct road to Charlestown and Boston; until on an elevated part of the road, I saw the smoke from the fire of a small number of militia muskets discharged at a distance, at the British troops. I halted the companies, and ordered them to load; in full expectation of coming to an engagement. At that moment a messenger arrived from General Heath, who informed me that the British troops had their artillery in their rear, and could not be approached by musketry; and that the general desired to see me. Leaving the companies in that position, I went across the fields, and met General Heath. We there soon after saw the British troops ascend the high ground called Bunker's hill. It was about sunset. The next day they entered Boston.—I last summer saw General Heath: he did not remember this interview. He had even forgotten my person; although we were acquainted with each other, both before and during the American war.—I returned to join the Salem militia, who marched back to Medford, where we staid that night, and the next day returned to Salem.

According to Dr. Ramsay, the British forces who marched to Lexington were 800 grenadiers and light infantry, the flower of the royal army; and they were reinforced by a detachment of 900 men under Lord Piercy. Of this number nearly three hundred were killed, wounded and taken prisoners; leaving a regular force of 1400 men; for not destroying whom, or making them prisoners, with four companies of militia, I have been reproached.

I think it was before the close of the year 1775, that in organizing the provisional government of Massachusetts, I was appointed one of the judges of the court of common pleas for Essex, my native county, and sole judge of the maritime court (which had cognizance of all prize-causes) for the middle district, comprehending Boston, with Salem and the other ports in Essex; offices which I held until I accepted an appointment in the army.

In the fall of 1776, the army under General Washington's command being greatly reduced in numbers, a large reinforcement of militia was called for; I think 5000 from Massachusetts. I took the command of the regiment of 700 men furnished from Essex. The quota of Salem was composed of volunteers. The aspect of our affairs was gloomy. I addressed the Salem militia, urging a cheerful tender of their services. One sentiment I expressed on that occasion is fresh in my memory: *That it was at such a time the real patriot would show his zeal and devotion to his country.*

This tour of militia duty was performed in the winter of 1776—7; terminating at Boundbrook, in New-Jersey; General Washington's head-quarters being at Morristown.

Soon after my return home, I received an invitation from General Washington, to take the office of adjutant-general. This I accepted, and joined the army under his command at Middlebrook, in New-Jersey.

General Howe having embarked his army at New-York, to proceed, as it was understood, either to Delaware or Chesapeake Bay, General Washington's army marched from New-Jersey to the state of Delaware; and thence into the adjacent part of Pennsylvania, to oppose the British army then marching from the Head of Elk for Philadelphia. On the 11th of September, the battle of Brandywine took place. After carrying General Washington's orders to a general officer at Chadsford, I repaired to the right, where the battle commenced; and remained by the general's side to its termination at the close of the day. Orders were given for



the troops to rendezvous at Chester, whence they marched the next day to the neighbourhood of Philadelphia. When refreshed, and supplied with ammunition, the army again crossed the Schuylkill river, and advanced to meet General Howe. On the 16th of September, in the morning, information was received of the approach of the enemy. Some detachments were made to reinforce the advanced guards, and keep the enemy in check, until the American army should be arrayed for action. General Washington ordered me to the right wing, to aid in forming the order of battle. On my return to the centre, I found the line not formed. Seeing the commander in chief with a number of officers about him, as in consultation, I pressed my horse up to learn the object. It was a question whether we should receive the British on the ground then occupied by our troops, or retire beyond a valley in their rear, in which the ground was said to be wet, and impassable with artillery, which, in case of a defeat, would of course be lost; excepting that with the left wing commanded by General Greene, through which there was a firm road. By this time, the fire of the troops engaged appeared to be drawing near. At this moment, the consultation yet continuing, I addressed General Washington. "Sir, (said "I) the advancing of the British is manifest by the reports of the "musketry. The order of battle is not completed. If we are to "fight the enemy on this ground, the troops ought to be immedi- "ately arranged. If we are to take the high grounds on the other "side of the valley, we ought to march immediately, or the enemy "may fall upon us in the midst of our movement."—"Let us "move"—was the General's answer. The movement took place. It had begun to rain. The British army halted. Ours formed on the high ground beyond the valley, and there remained during a very rainy day. We then marched to a place called the Yellow Springs.—The cartridge boxes were bad, and nearly all the ammunition in them was spoiled. Hence it became necessary to keep aloof from the enemy till fresh ammunition could be made up and distributed.\*

\* Since writing this, I have turned to Gordon's history (not twenty pages of which I had ever read) to see his account of this day's proceedings. My statement furnishes additional circumstances. I have recited what *I saw* and what *I personally know*.

On the 4th of October, General Washington attacked the British troops at Germantown. After the right wing, commanded by General Sullivan, had for some time been briskly engaged, General Washington sent me forward with an order to that officer. Having delivered it, I returned to rejoin the commander in chief.—It had been found that a party of the British troops had taken post in a large and strong stone house, since well known by the name of Chew's house, on which our light field artillery could make no impression. This house stood back a few rods from the road. I first discovered the enemy to be there, by their firing at me from the windows, on my return from General Sullivan.

On rejoining General Washington, I found a question was agitated, in his presence, Whether the whole of the troops then behind should pass on, regardless of the enemy in Chew's house, or summon them to surrender. A brave and distinguished officer (now no more) urged a summons. He said it would be "unmilitary to leave a castle in our rear." I answered—"doubtless, that is a correct general maxim; but it does not apply in this case. We know the extent of this castle (Chew's house;) and to guard against the danger from the enemy's falling out and falling on the rear of our troops, a small regiment may be posted here to watch them: and if they fall out, such a regiment *will take care of them*. But (I added) to summon them to surrender will be useless. We are now in the midst of the battle; and its issue is unknown. In this state of uncertainty, and so well secured as the enemy find themselves, they will not regard a summons: *they will fire at your flag*."—However, a subaltern officer, with a white flag and drum, was sent with a summons. He had reached the gate at the road, when a shot from a window gave him a wound of which he died.\*

\* Here, again, I have since looked at Gordon's account. He mentions General Knox as the officer who said "it would be unmilitary to leave a castle in our rear." It was General Knox. And it was to him (in the presence of General Washington) that I gave the answer above stated in my letter. Gordon puts the following words into the mouth of General Reed, in answer to General Knox—"What! call this a fort, and lose the happy moment"—But General Reed was not present. He had been adjutant-general in 1776; but

In December, the army marched to Valley Forge, and took up their winter quarters in log huts which they erected at that place.

Before this, the Congress, then sitting at Yorktown in Pennsylvania, had elected me a member of the Continental Board of War. General Gates and General Mifflin were elected members of the same board: and before the expiration of the winter, we repaired to Yorktown, where the board sat. In this station I remained until General Greene resigned the office of quarter-master-general. On the 5th of August 1780, Congress elected me his successor; and I continued in the office of quarter-master-general during the remainder of the war.

The project of besieging the city of New-York, in 1781, having been relinquished, and the siege of Yorktown, in Virginia, resolved on, I received General Washington's orders to prepare immediately for the march of a part of the army to that place, and for the transportation of artillery, and of all the stores requisite for the siege. This was done. The event is known to every body. Lord Cornwallis and his army were made prisoners. This decided the fate of the war. In the succeeding winter, the British government, despairing of conquest, abandoned all offensive operations in America: and in November, 1782, articles of peace were agreed on.

From the the year 1790 to 1794, I was charged, by General Washington (then President of the United States) with several negociations with the Indian nations on our frontiers: In 1793, in a joint commission with General Lincoln and Beverly Randolph, Esq. of Virginia, to treat of peace with the western Indians: And in 1794, I was appointed the sole agent to adjust all our disputes with the six nations; which were terminated by a satisfactory treaty.

did not now belong to the army. Early in December, afterwards, when General Howe marched from Philadelphia to Chestnut-Hill, (the American army being then posted two or three miles farther off, on the high grounds of White-Marsh) General Reed was with a party of Pennsylvania militia; and in a skirmish with some British troops, had a horse shot under him: an event which has furnished a subject for an historick painter.

In the year 1791, General Washington appointed me Post-Master General. In this office I continued until the close of the year 1794 ; when, on the resignation of General Knox, I was appointed Secretary of War. In August 1795, Mr. Edmund Randolph having resigned the office of secretary of state, General Washington gave me the temporary charge of that department also. Some time before the meeting of Congress, which was in December following, he tendered to me the office of Secretary of State. At the same time he frankly told me the names of several gentlemen whom he had invited to accept, but who had declined the office. They were men of the first abilities and distinction, and for whom I entertain the highest respect. General Washington knew me well, and that I had not enough of vanity or ambition to be wounded or humbled by his preference of those men. I only regretted that they all declined the office. For myself, I objected that the duties of the department of state were foreign to my former pursuits in life ; and I thought myself unequal to the proper discharge of them. He desired me to take the matter into consideration. When he again spoke to me on the subject, I observed, that although the gentlemen he had named to me, declined the office, yet, by a little delay he might find some other candidate to fill it. The session of Congress was approaching. By inquiry among the members, he might obtain information of a fit character not then occurring to him ; and I requested him to postpone the matter till the meeting of Congress. The president acquiesced. But as soon as Congress assembled—without speaking to me again, he nominated me to the senate to be secretary of state : and the senate approved the nomination. I continued in this office until May 1800 ; when I was removed by the late President Adams. On this act I should still have continued silent, had it not given occasion to add one more reproach to the former malicious slanders on my character.—I am reproached for having been removed from the office of secretary of state (as I have just mentioned) on the supposition that this would not have been done but for some sufficient cause, honourable to the president, and dishonourable to me. On this I must remark, that I had held that office about a year and a half under General Washington, and three years and two months under President Adams,



and until ten months only remained of his own term of office. For what did he remove me?—He never told me. Was it for any dishonest or dishonourable act?—He will not say it. Was it for British attachments?—He will not say it. Was it for my incapacity?—If that were the cause, and it be well founded, a statesman of his experience and discernment ought sooner to have made the discovery.—But without troubling myself about my dismissal, which even at the time excited a scarcely sensible resentment, and after that little had ceased for years; I should not now have mentioned the subject, had not the herd of libellers, and your Excellency's own insinuations, constrained me to exhibit this narrative of the principal incidents of my life. To my friends I am sure it will not be uninteresting: and I fondly hope that others of my fellow citizens who may read it, will not think the time lost which shall be occupied in the perusal. I hope also, that to oppose a series of incontrovertible facts to general reproach, may not be deemed an improper mode of vindication.

At the close of the year 1801, I returned to live in Massachusetts. In 1803, the legislature appointed me a senator to represent the state in Congress, for the residue of the term of Dwight Foster, Esq. who had resigned. In 1805, the legislature again elected me a senator, and for the term of six years. ✓

Such, Sir, is the publick life of the man whom you have wantonly defamed, and whose character your shameless advocates have attempted to destroy.

Being in debt for new lands purchased some years before, and by the appreciation of which I had hoped to have made an eventual provision for my eight surviving children; and having no other resources;—as soon as I was removed from office, in 1800, I carried my family from Philadelphia into the country; and with one of my sons went into the back woods of Pennsylvania, where, with the aid of some labourers, we cleared a few acres of my land, sowed wheat, and built a log hut, into which I meant the next year to remove my family.—From this condition we were drawn

by the kindness of my friends in Massachusetts. By the spontaneous liberality of those friends (of whom some were then to me unknown) in taking a transfer of new lands (*for my sake*, not their own) in exchange for money, I was enabled to pay my debts, to return to my native state, and finally to purchase a small farm, in Essex, on which I live, which I cultivate with my own hands, and literally with the sweat of my brow. In this retreat, engaged in what with peculiar pleasure I had always contemplated, *rural occupations*, I have found contentment.

This long letter, Sir, I shall send to the printer ; it being the mode of communication which your Excellency has been pleased to propose.

I remain, Sir,

Your humble Servant,

TIMOTHY PICKERING.

*His Excellency JAMES SULLIVAN, Esq.*

*Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.*













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